GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS
LOK SABHA

STARRED QUESTION NO:379
ANSWERED ON:19.12.2005
TAJ CORRIDOR PROJECT
Paraste Shri Dalpat Singh

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

:

(a) whether stones on the river-front near Taj Mahal pose environmental threat to this world heritage monument ;

(b) if so, whether the stones laid for the Taj Corridor project right behind the Taj on the river front have not yet been removed by the Archaeological Survey of India ;

(c) if so, the details thereof alongwith the reasons therefor ;

(d) whether any expert group was set up by the UNESCO in view of the apprehension that the stones laid for the project could affect the Taj;

(e) if so, the details regarding the report of the expert team of UNESCO; and

(f) the reaction of the Government thereto ?

Answer

MINISTER OF THE STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI A. RAJA)

(a)to(f) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement referred to in reply to parts (a) to (f) of Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 379 to be answered on 19th December, 2005 on `Taj Corridor Project` by Shri Dalpat Singh Parste.

(a)to(c)The matter relating to the Taj Heritage Corridor Project is subjudice in the Hon`ble Supreme Court. Recently, the Court has set up a Committee for the purpose of facilitating the rehabilitation of the area which was disturbed by reason of the constructions made pursuant to the Taj Heritage Corridor project. The terms of reference of this Committee inter-alia include a report to be submitted in the matter of

(i) removal of the debris; and

(ii) taking of further steps to ensure that the maximum protection is given to the environment in and around the Taj, including the cost of removal of debris and the embankment, if necessary. Further, at the outset, the Committee is to note the present status of the environment including the steps taken for the construction of the Taj Heritage Corridor and take an inventory of the debris.

(d) & (e) A Committee constituted by United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) - International Council On Monumnets & Sites

(ICOMOS) Joint Monitoring Mission to Taj Mahal, Agra Fort and Fatehpur Sikri had visited India in January, 2004. A summary of Mission recommendations is enclosed at Annexure.

(f) The Matter relating to the Taj Heritage Corridor Project is subjudice in the Hon`ble Supreme Court.

Annexure

Annexure referred to in parts (d) & (e) of the Statement enclosed in reply to Lok Sabha Starred Question No. 379 to be answered on 19th December, 2005 by Shri Dalpat Singh Parste on `Taj Corridor Project. SUMMARY OF MISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

1.It is essential that the World Heritage protective boundaries and management guidelines pertaining to the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort be evaluated and possibly redefined. Note should be taken of recent research which indicates that the original design of the Taj monument included the Mehtab Bagh and other relocated cultural properties across the Yamuna River. These constitute an essential part of the whole area and therefore require integrated protection.

2.Integrate the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort as one protected World Heritage area, to ensure better management of the property, with a possible inclusion of Fatehpur Sikri subject to a broader regional planning scheme.

3. At the institutional building level, it is recommended to build a participatory planning, conservation and management process, involving regular consultations with different stakeholders involved in the site, and their direct participation in the site management. It is proposed that a Steering Committee be established, possibly chaired by the Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism, to address the conservation development of the three World Heritage properties in the Agra district of UP. The Steering Committee may regularly approve and update a Regional Plan for Conservation and Development of World Heritage properties in the Agra district.

4.The elaboration of a comprehensive site management plan and its effective implementation are essential to address the conservation challenge at the site. The management plan should be developed on the basis of a Regional Plan for Conservation and Development,

5.The properties would greatly benefit from an improved on-site presentation and an enhanced visitor management. A new Visitor Centre was seen by the mission, which noted that the concept proposed by the site management.It is therefore recommended that a Visitor-Management Plan be elaborated and implemented as a matter of urgency. This Plan would address current problems, such as upgrading visitor capacity with a view to economic development, and exploring new initiatives to reduce tourist pressure.

6.It is essential to identify site monitoring indicators and elaborate on-site monitoring mechanisms, in order to assess urban development pressure on protected areas and the areas surrounding them.These mechanisms may use new information technology systems, such as GIS (Geographical Information System), to integrate the protection of urban landscape and monitor the state of conservation of World Heritage properties in the Periodic Report on the State of Conservation of the properties concerned, which is required to be submitted to the World Heritage Committee every six years.